Bear Creek Watershed Restoration Project FAQs
3/11/14

Trails

- **Why were the trails closed in September 2013? Was it to protect the fish?**
  - Many recreationists believe the trails are closed because of the trout. The trails were closed for safety reasons. Flood damage, combined with the potential for snow cover to "hide" dangerous areas from recreationists made the area unsafe.

- **Can't we do repair work to the trails so they can reopen while you work on NEPA?**
  - We understand that some recreationists may want to simply repair the dangerous sections of trail/road, and then reopen them. Any work in the watershed requires specialist input and consultation and concurrence from the US Fish and Wildlife Service. We are concentrating our efforts on the long term management decisions for the watershed, which will consider all of these trails.

- **If you are moving trails out of the riparian area to eliminate impacts, why is there still a need for seasonal closure? What time period is covered by the proposed seasonal trail closure?**
  - Based on feedback we received at the April 4, 2013 open house and during the following public scoping period, the seasonal closures have been removed from all of the alternatives. While there will not be an annual season closure, emergency closures could be issued if weather conditions cause the trail to become unsafe for public use or to protect resources from damage.

- **Under the proposed change, how will I access the historic areas and structures in Jones Park?**
  - Under the Proposed Action and alternatives, there will not be public access to historic areas or structures. This is based on the need to protect the fish by removing trails in the area of the structures, not because of a desire to make the structures inaccessible. RMFI and Great Outdoors consultants attempted to find a sustainable route for a trail through Jones Park and were unable to do so.

- **Can I still hike to Mt Garfield, Mt Arthur and Tenney Crags?**
  - The peaks are accessible from the watersheds north of the Bear Creek watershed. Trail 667, which is where the current routes to the peaks originate, is proposed to be closed to protect the fish. RMFI and Great Outdoors consultants attempted to find a sustainable reroute for Trail 667 and were unable to do so.

- **Once the greenback is transplanted into the South Platte Drainage will all the trails in Bear Creek be reopened?**
  - The fish in Bear Creek will remain critically important, as the original broodstock, and will likely require long-term protection. If protection status changes, the Bear Creek trail system can be reevaluated.

- **Will there be a restriction on cross country travel for hikers?**
  - Yes, no off-trail use is permitted under the current Proposed Action and Action Alternatives.

- **If some of the historic trails are closed to use how will they be preserved?**
    - Trails that are proposed for closure would be decommissioned. The historic significance of the trails will be evaluated and consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office will be conducted. Historically significant trails could be decommissioned.

- **How did the flooding damage affect the proposed action and alternatives?**
    - Though there was additional damage to the trails as a result of the flooding, changes to the proposed action and alternatives were not needed.

- **Are all types of use (e.g., hiking, mountain bike, motorized) similar in their impacts?**
    - The primary concern about sedimentation comes from the very existence of the trails/road on the landscape, not necessarily which user group is using it. Bare soil is erosive and compacted trails and roads concentrate flows. Concentrated flows have more power and cause stream instability.

- **I am not familiar with the trail numbers in the document. I know the trails by name.**
    - (622) Seven Bridges, (622.A) Seven Bridges, (665) Penrose, (666) Bear Creek, (667) Jones Park(668) Pipeline, (701) Foresters, (720) Foresters Cutoff

Fish

- **How did the flooding affect the fish?**
    - Only limited population sampling was conducted since the September flooding. It is anticipated that some fish may have been lost or displaced from the high flows, but overall population survival is expected to be good. This population experienced similar high flows in both 1997 and 1999. A fishery assessment of the entire drainage is planned for 2014.

- **Why is it so important to save this population of trout? Don't we have greenbacks all over the Front Range? The fish have been fine for 100+ years—why the concern now?**
    - The University of Colorado genetic study clearly indicates that the Bear Creek cutthroats are the last true greenback cutthroat trout in the state. This makes them extremely important for Colorado's native cutthroat program. The Bear Creek fish have not yet been stocked into other streams or lakes in Colorado, although some transplants are planned for 2014.
    - Because of their status as threatened, these fish are afforded protection under the Endangered Species Act. This Act is intended to preserve our natural heritage of species and their habitats for future generations.
    - Although this population has been able to survive for over a century, it is clear from genetic analysis that this population has been reduced to just a few hundred individuals during that time.

- **Why not just move the cutthroat trout out of Bear Creek, rather than attempting to close or reroute the trails?**
    - It is unknown how these trout would function in a different drainage. Therefore, the security of this rare population depends on remaining in Bear Creek for the foreseeable future. Bear Creek cutthroats were moved into hatcheries several years ago and fish

now being produced will be used to begin replicating the population. However, it will take several years to determine if other reintroduced populations are truly self-sustaining. Regardless, Bear Creek will also have the most genetically diverse population and as a source population will always be important.

- **Why is the trail a problem for the cutthroat trout?**
    - Like other streams on Pikes Peak, the decomposing granite geology of the basin poses a high risk of erosion and sedimentation. Trails add more instability to side slopes and riparian areas increasing the sedimentation. This increased sedimentation accumulates in the stream channel and reduces pool depth, impedes spawning and limits food production.
    - Streams have naturally evolved to accommodate storm events and maintain stream dimensions. Trails concentrate overland flow and when the flows reach the stream, the highly erosive decomposed granite stream banks are susceptible to erosion. The consequences of these direct alterations to the stream channel create river instability. The erosion causes channel enlargement as well as increased deposition and aggrading of pool habitat.

- **I heard that the greenback cutthroat trout in Bear Creek do not actually belong there – is that true?**
    - Based on the genetic study and newspaper accounts, these fish were likely translocated from the South Platte River basin to Bear Creek (in the Arkansas River basin) in the mid-1880s. However, at this time greenback cutthroat trout are a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act and the entire State of Colorado is designated as the native range. It is required by the federal Endangered Species Act that the fish in Bear Creek and the habitat be protected.

- **Is there a plan to transplant Bear Creek greenback into the South Platte Drainage?**
    - Adult Bear Creek cutthroats at federal and state hatcheries were spawned in 2013. The resulting young fish are being raised for stocking in spring 2014 into the South Platte River basin.
- **Are there any plans to improve habitat within the stream?**
    - Yes. The first priority is to restore habitat in Bear Creek in the segment paralleling High Drive.
    - The concentrated flows from High Drive and from the trail system have caused instability in Bear Creek. In areas where the stream has enlarged and where there is excessive deposition, stream restoration is required to protect the fish.

- **Will the Fish & Wildlife Service be changing the status of the greenback from threatened to endangered? If so, what process and timeline will be used?**
    - The US Fish & Wildlife Service completed the Greenback Cutthroat Trout Scientific Review Workshop in August. This was the first step in the Endangered Species Act evaluation process which entailed a review of the conclusions of existing studies, as well as taxonomy revision considerations. A summary of the proceedings will be available to the public, hopefully by summer 2014. The next step in this process will be to evaluate the classification of cutthroat trout by assessing lineages and ranges. Once that is complete, the USFWS will review the threats to the various cutthroats and determine whether a change in listing status is appropriate.

High Drive

- **Rather than expend significant funds on fixing up High Drive, why not just shut it down to vehicle traffic?**
    - Closing the road to recreation vehicular traffic is part of the Proposed Action. A detailed engineering road assessment completed by CH2M Hill in 2013 recommended that the drainage pattern off the road must be corrected. Regardless of what the decision is for long-term use of the road, the road is still needed for administrative purposes such as rescue, fire control, etc.

Timeline

- **When will the Forest Service complete NEPA that will allow trails to be reopened?**
    - We plan to complete the Environmental Assessment and consultation with the US Fish & Wildlife Service and the State Historic Preservation Office in the summer of 2014. Then a final decision could be made in the late summer/fall 2014.

- **When does the Forest Service anticipate that reroutes and trail closures/rehab will be complete?**
    - The timeline is uncertain. Work will commence after a decision is made.

- **Will the new trails be built before the existing trails are closed?**
    - The schedule for construction and decommissioning is not determined, and will depend on concurrence from the US Fish & Wildlife Service and State Historic Preservation Office. We will keep stakeholders informed of trail construction via the project website: http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/psicc/home

- **Where can I go to find out more information about greenback cutthroat and the status of management and restoration activities for Bear Creek?**
    - http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/psicc/home